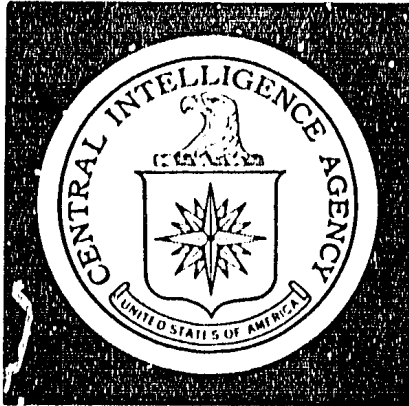


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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and the Politburo

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
15 December 1970

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and the Politburo

Summary

The decision of the Royal Swedish Academy to present the Nobel Prize for Literature to the controversial novelist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn has raised a difficult problem for the Soviet leadership.

Solzhenitsyn's works have periodically aroused considerable political controversy in the Soviet Union, not because of their literary merits--which have been grudgingly acknowledged by many of his Soviet critics--but because of their political significance. In Solzhenitsyn's novels one character--Stalin--is always present as the symbol of oppression of the human spirit.

The far-reaching political implications of this negative assessment of Stalin, who is both the symbol of larger moral issues and the yardstick against which Solzhenitsyn measures the Soviet past and the present, continue to stimulate political controversy around the novelist. The Nobel Laureate, believing that the basis of literature must be "deep experiencing of social processes," has depicted the suffering of the Russian people under Stalin and the bitter consequences of his arbitrary use of power.

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Solzhenitsyn's message did not professionally handicap him during the years of de-Stalinization, when Khrushchev--although for different reasons--shared the author's views. The present leadership, however, has reversed Khrushchev's policy and is slowly rehabilitating Stalin. In the process, it has forbidden criticism of Stalin's collectivization of agriculture, forced industrialization, and preparation for and conduct of World War II, all of which, in varying degrees, had been severely criticized during Khrushchev's regime. Committed to the principle that the truth must be told, Solzhenitsyn has continued since the fall of Khrushchev to portray Stalin's actions in these fields in dark colors.

Although the author's immediate difficulties stem from the Swedish academy's decision, the basic source of his problems--and also those of the leadership in handling Solzhenitsyn--is his long and close identification with anti-Stalinism. From the leadership's perspective, anti-Stalinism is a political problem that raises the threat of changes in the Soviet system. For Solzhenitsyn, however, it is a symbol of the moral issues to which he is personally committed.

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"For a country to have a great writer is like having another government. That's why no regime has ever loved great writers, only minor ones."

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn,
The First Circle

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Solzhenitsyn and De-Stalinization

1. In the Byzantine atmosphere of the Soviet Union, where public debate over current political issues is so restricted that it must be broached through the medium of historical analogies, it is natural that Stalin, who played such an overwhelming role in Soviet affairs, should have become a symbol of major significance. The Stalin image is so sensitive politically that even mild approval or criticism of a minor aspect of the Stalin era is an important indicator of position in the Soviet political spectrum.

2. Khrushchev will probably be remembered, among other things, for his attempt to free the Soviet Union from the stultifying legacy of Stalin, even though his de-Stalinization campaign was waged to consolidate his own power and to facilitate his various schemes for reorganization of the Soviet system. Khrushchev's personal ideas had little in common with liberalism as understood by the Soviet intelligentsia, despite the fact that a degree of liberalization and reorientation of priorities accompanied his de-Stalinization campaign.

3. In late 1962, when he was encountering some opposition within the Presidium, Khrushchev used two liberal writers, Yevgeny Yevtushenko and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, to put his political rivals on the defensive. Yevtushenko's poem, "Stalin's Heirs," published in Pravda as a result of Khrushchev's personal intervention, had great political impact. The poem warned that Stalin's heirs were alive and biding their time, and it appealed to the government to "double, to triple the guard at his gravestone, so that Stalin cannot rise again."

4. Shortly after Yevtushenko's poem appeared, the prestigious literary monthly, Novy Mir, published Solzhenitsyn's first provocative novel, One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich. This book, a taut, tragic account of concentration camp life under Stalin, was the first to set the political

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purges in perspective, presenting them as a mass phenomenon and not the result of individual "mistakes" or even "excessive zeal" on the part of the authorities. Solzhenitsyn showed that many prisoners did lose faith in the Communist Party and looked outside of it for liberty and justice. The details of camp life were drawn from Solzhenitsyn's personal experience. While serving as a captain in the Soviet Army in January 1945, he was arrested for his critical remarks about Stalin's leadership in a letter to a friend. For this "crime" he spent eight years in a labor camp and three more years in exile.

5. Although Khrushchev's approval ensured that the initial reviews of One Day in the Soviet press would be favorable, not everyone fell into line. As early as January 1963, Literary Gazette carried cautious criticism of Solzhenitsyn for failing to show that the party had advanced despite Stalin and that the period of the cult of personality was not one of utter despair. Two months later, however, Khrushchev publicly praised the novel for explaining "Soviet reality and the personality cult truthfully."

6. Khrushchev's support subdued criticism of One Day, but some of Solzhenitsyn's short stories that appeared that year without Khrushchev's endorsement precipitated a debate between Novy Mir and Literary Gazette that indicated quite clearly the political significance of Solzhenitsyn's works and probably reflected the division of opinion in the Kremlin. The July 1963 issue of Novy Mir carried Solzhenitsyn's story "For the Good of the Cause," which expanded on the theme of Yevtushenko's "Stalin's Heirs." In portraying the gulf between ordinary people and the inflexible bureaucrats of the Stalin school, Solzhenitsyn contrasted the "old" official, who arbitrarily decided what was good for the state, with the "new" official, whose decisions took into account the desires of the people and even the problems of economic efficiency.

7. For the most part, the quarreling reviewers ignored the story's literary merits--which are considerable--and concentrated on its political aspects.

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Conservatives accused the author of writing an "abstract" story that reflected past--not present--Soviet reality and criticized him for not adopting a party-minded attitude toward the issues he had raised. Solzhenitsyn's supporters contended that the story did indeed reflect present reality, and argued that if the cult of personality were wrong, then the methods of the "old" bureaucrats who were still alive must also be wrong. Echoing Khrushchev's speeches, they also argued that attention must be focused on economic efficiency, not economic development at any cost.

8. In two other major works, The Cancer Ward and The First Circle, completed since Khrushchev's ouster, Solzhenitsyn not only developed these themes but also repudiated any kind of despotism. Although these novels have not been published in the Soviet Union, they circulate there in manuscript form and have been warmly received by Soviet readers.

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9. Solzhenitsyn's new novel, August 1914, which treats World War I and the October Revolution, will continue Solzhenitsyn's appraisal of major events of the Soviet era. Solzhenitsyn's previous works suggest that his appraisal of the revolution will be offensive to the regime. August 1914 may be the most thought-provoking and controversial critique of the Soviet system's fundamental principles that he has yet written.

Conflict With a New Regime and Re-Stalinization

10. Solzhenitsyn's views have remained consistent, but the political atmosphere in which he writes has changed markedly since 1964. Under the collective leadership that followed Khrushchev, Stalin's image--so thoroughly blackened in the political infighting of the 1950s and early 1960s--has been slowly refurbished. First to be pronounced off-limits for criticism was Stalin's record as a wartime leader. In the fall of 1965, collectivization, industrialization, cultural controls, and Soviet preparations for World

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War II were also declared sacrosanct, and considerable doubt was cast on the whole program of "post-humous rehabilitation" of those executed under Stalin.

11. In this new political climate, numerous attempts have been made to discredit Solzhenitsyn and his works. In 1965, the "artistic and ideological aspects" of One Day were severely criticized in the central committee's journal Kommunist by the then Moscow party boss, Nikolay Yegorychev. Yegorychev also attacked Solzhenitsyn's works at the 23rd Party Congress the following year. Public criticism of this sort has been accompanied by other attempts in private to disgrace and intimidate the novelist. Although he managed to publish a few short stories after the fall of Khrushchev, since early 1966--when Novy Mir carried his story "Kulikovo Field"--he has been unable to publish anything in the Soviet Union.

12. In the spring of 1967, the Moscow branch of the Writers' Union met to consider the advisability of publishing The Cancer Ward and, true to its record of being one of the more liberal segments of the Union, recommended its publication. Its endorsement was reportedly "wrathfully received" by higher authorities, and publication of the novel was postponed. Several months later, the Secretariat of the Writers' Union convened to discuss Solzhenitsyn's now-famous letter to the Fourth Writers' Congress in which he had condemned censorship of fictional literature, had denounced official pressures and intrigues against him and his works, and had protested the unauthorized "closed edition" of The First Circle for "an unidentified select circle." During this meeting, Solzhenitsyn was advised that an "abridged" (and censored) edition of The Cancer Ward would be published if he wrote another letter repudiating his earlier one and rejecting the "exploitation" of his name by "enemies in the West." Solzhenitsyn refused, and the meeting ended in an impasse. The Secretariat convened again a few weeks later and promised to publish the "abridged" version of the novel together with a favorable biographic sketch of the author. Solzhenitsyn agreed to write the desired letter after the novel had appeared.

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13. Last year, allegedly at the initiative of the Kremlin, the Ryazan branch of the Writers' Union to which Solzhenitsyn belonged expelled Solzhenitsyn from the Union for portraying Soviet life in a "black way." The expulsion was later endorsed by the RSFSR Writers' Union and again by a conference of the various unions of intellectuals. Even Solzhenitsyn's years of imprisonment and exile--which under Khrushchev gave him an aura of martyrdom as one of Stalin's victims--have now been turned against him with dark hints of his "treason" in World War II.

14. Taken as a whole, Solzhenitsyn's works present a totally negative appraisal of those periods that the regime now hails as being the ones of great achievement in the Stalin years. Moreover, the author rejects the official contention that the "cult of personality"--its errors corrected by the party--is finished and should be forgotten. Solzhenitsyn, however, is concerned with more than specific "errors" and "shortcomings" of Stalin; the Soviet dictator is merely a symbol for much larger issues that deeply concern him--the arbitrary use of power and the oppression of the human spirit. This is the yardstick against which he measures both the Soviet past and the present.

15. In line with the great traditions of classical Russian literature, he firmly adheres to the principles of humanism and insists that literature, regardless of the personal consequences, must faithfully reflect both the attractive and unattractive aspects of life. By refusing to compromise with

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a system intent on oppressing the human spirit, Solzhenitsyn has become an important moral force in the Soviet Union today. Thus 12 inmates of a Soviet labor camp wrote to the author congratulating him on the Nobel award and expressing their "delight" in his courageous work. A spokesman for the Royal Swedish Academy noted that Solzhenitsyn was selected to receive the Nobel Prize on the basis of "the ethical force with which he has pursued the indispensable traditions of Russian literature."

Preserving the "Balance" on Stalin

16. Solzhenitsyn's provocative writings and statements have not called forth reprisals as severe as those the regime has taken against some of its other critics. By itself, the author's prestige would probably not have stayed the hand of repression, but combined with his close identification with the still highly sensitive Stalin issue, it seems to have given the leadership cause to proceed cautiously. In spite of the drift toward the rehabilitation of Stalin, there has been no clear directive on the subject from the top leadership, and the occasionally erratic course of the refurbishment of his reputation suggests that there is some division within the Krem'lin. Solzhenitsyn thus presents the leadership with a dilemma far more complex than the conventional problem of disciplining a dissident novelist.

17. Even pro-Stalin novels reportedly have caused some problems in the leadership this year. During a conservative attack on liberal intellectuals in late 1969 and early 1970, Ivan Shevtsov--who is notably untalented and is not a member of the Writers' Union--published two reactionary, pro-Stalin works, In the Name of the Father and the Son, and Love and Hate. The novels, going to extremes that even the party had eschewed, wholeheartedly endorsed Stalin, justified the bloodshed of collectivization and the purges, and praised the workers while portraying liberal intellectuals as dupes of the West. The initial reviews of Shevtsov's novels were mild and totally ignored the important issues

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he raised. He picked up support when the conservative RSFSR newspaper, Sovetskaya Rossiya, which is reportedly responsive to Politburo member Dmitry Polyansky, praised his work and severely rebuked his critics. Liberal elements had been trying for some time to get Brezhnev to take a stand against the books. Finally they got to Suslov instead and persuaded him that Shevtsov's works should be condemned because they had been highly praised by the Chinese.

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In the end, a compromise of sorts was reached. Although Pravda carried a scathing review of the novels by its literary editor damning the books as "ideologically corrupt and artistically worthless," it avoided any reference to their total endorsement of Stalin. The rebuke in Pravda did not, however, discourage Shevtsov and his cohorts

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18. Solzhenitsyn's unaltering opposition to Stalin presents to the leadership the other side of the Shevtsov coin, and brings equally difficult problems. The international reputation of Solzhenitsyn is an additional complication. Because publication of Solzhenitsyn's works is already prohibited in the Soviet Union, a compromise like the Shevtsov "solution" is impossible. Severe measures seem required to rid the leadership of Solzhenitsyn. Agreement on such measures, however, would not only be difficult because of his close identification with anti-Stalinism, but would have adverse psychological repercussions within the Soviet Union.

The Nobel Prize: A Dilemma

19. The leadership was placed in a quandary when the announcement of the Nobel Prize award was made. The Soviet press and spokesman for the Writers' Union denounced the decision of the Nobel committee

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as "political" and "provocative," but their commentary was rather mild and totally ignored Solzhenitsyn's 8 October statement--published only in the West--that he would like to accept the award personally. The indecisiveness of this reaction contrasts sharply with the well-orchestrated furor that raged in 1958 when Pasternak was forced to refuse the award, and it almost certainly reflects the absence of guidance from a perplexed and embarrassed Kremlin.

Political Support for Solzhenitsyn?

20. Solzhenitsyn's identification with anti-Stalinism and the struggle for human rights in the Soviet Union serves both to incite the guardians of political and cultural orthodoxy and to prevent them from taking decisive action against him. In addition, the controversial novelist's supporters may still have some political influence. Political support was clearly evident during the years of de-Stalinization, when Khrushchev himself approved of Solzhenitsyn and his publisher, the liberal editor Aleksandr Tvardovsky, had some political influence through his association with Khrushchev.

21. Under the collective leadership, the source of Solzhenitsyn's support is more difficult to identify. He has continued to receive some backing from Tvardovsky and other liberal intellectuals. Composer Dmitry Shostakovich and the cellist Mstislav Rostropovich have assisted Solzhenitsyn by providing him with a place to live since he lost his teaching position. Rostropovich alone has publicly defended the novelist during the press campaign against him in the aftermath of the Nobel Prize announcement. In late October, the cellist wrote to the editors of Pravda, Izvestia, and other newspapers defending the author's right to tell the truth as he sees it and condemning the authority of "absolutely incompetent people" to discredit Soviet art. This first public protest from an internationally acclaimed artist had more impact in the West than in the Soviet Union, but it is possible that the letter may also have had some effect within the leadership.

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Outlook

23. On 27 November Solzhenitsyn announced that he would prefer to receive the award at the Swedish Embassy in Moscow because he feared that he would not be allowed to return to the Soviet Union from Stockholm. He also stated that he would "deliver or hand over in written form" the required Nobel Lecture within six months. His statement suggests that in the bargaining between Solzhenitsyn and the Soviet authorities the crucial factor on both sides was the author's deep feeling for his homeland and his unwillingness to start a new life abroad. The silence or ambiguity of the authorities on permission for re-entry probably convinced the novelist that it would be better to remain in the Soviet Union than to risk permanent exile. Solzhenitsyn's decision spares the regime the unfavorable publicity that would have accompanied overt action to prevent the novelist from receiving the Nobel Prize in Stockholm. But it also keeps the spotlight on the novelist and his views and may make it difficult for the regime to influence the content of his lecture.

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24. Because the Nobel Committee will permit Solzhenitsyn to receive the award in the Soviet Union--but after 10 December so as to avoid detracting from the Stockholm ceremonies--the most important consequence of his maneuvering may be to set a precedent the leadership is probably anxious to avoid. If he does receive the award, the presence of an outstanding anti-Stalinist holding the Nobel Prize in the Soviet Union will be a source of constant embarrassment to the regime, and it will heighten interest in his latest novel, August 1914, which like his other works will probably circulate in manuscript form. It will, moreover, provide encouragement to the liberal intellectuals who have recently been the object of several attacks in the Soviet press on the grounds that they lack ideological conviction. Solzhenitsyn's handling of the present controversy confirms what one of his critics said about him three years ago: "The works of Solzhenitsyn are more dangerous to us than those of Pasternak: Pasternak was a man divorced from life, while Solzhenitsyn, with his animated, militant, ideological temperament, is a man of principle."

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